



DEPARTMENT OF STATE

WASHINGTON, DC 20520

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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

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SUBJECT: Afghanistan and U.S.-Afghan Relations

PARTICIPANTS:

Vasiliy K. Gorovoi, First Secretary, USSR
Embassy

Ronald D. Lorton, Country Officer for
Afghanistan

DATE: April 11, 1979

DISTRIBUTION:

NEA/PAB, EUR/SOV, S/MS, SY, INR/RNA/SOA,
INR/OIL/B, NEA-Mr. Miklos, Embassy Kabul,
Embassy Moscow, Embassy Islamabad,
Embassy Tehran, Embassy New Delhi, NSC-
Mr. Thornton

Gorovoi said he had not been able to understand developments in U.S.-Afghan relations since he had last met with Lorton, commenting that on his last visit (February 8) relations between the U.S. and Afghanistan had appeared to be "calm" but that since the terrible event which resulted in the death of the American Ambassador in Kabul there had been an abrupt change in those relations. He cited as evidence, the U.S. decision to reduce economic aid to Afghanistan and calls in Congress for other actions such as withdrawal of the Peace Corps. Gorovoi explained these developments as incomprehensible because the U.S. has always sought to preserve its position around the world.

Lorton agreed there have been difficulties in the U.S.-Afghan relationship, explaining that although relations before February 14 had been normal, we nonetheless had a number of questions on our minds including

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our inability to agree with the Afghans on various matters of international concern and the apparent lack of interest in the part of the DRA in many of the programs we were continuing to offer. What disturbed us about the handling of the kidnapping of Ambassador Dubs was the DRA's complete lack of cooperation or even consultation with us in their handling of the incident. All of these factors were part of our decision to reduce our assistance level, Lorton concluded.

Gorovoi questioned what he called the U.S. view that the Soviets were in a position to control the behavior of the Afghans at that time. He said Afghanistan was a sovereign country and denied that the USSR is in any position to "order" the Afghans to do something. Lorton demurred and said it was not a question of issuing orders, but our view that the Soviets who were advising the Afghans should have been in a position to urge restraint on them. In reality, the Soviets even played an operational role in some aspects of the anti-terrorist operation, according to eyewitness reports. Nonetheless, Lorton noted we have expressed our view to interested Members of Congress and others that it is the Afghan Government which must bear the responsibility for the outcome of their action.

Gorovoi opined it is difficult to see how U.S.-Afghan relations can make progress in the light of the sharp U.S. decisions. Lorton said the U.S. had no desire to see a deterioration in our relationship with Afghanistan but observed that one of the major difficulties in having a cooperative relationship in the future is the continuing charges emanating from Moscow regarding outside interference in Afghanistan's affairs. Lorton noted the two recent public statements made by the U.S. in this regard, reaffirming that the U.S. has not interfered and has no intention of interfering in Afghanistan's affairs. Improvements in U.S.-Afghan relations would be difficult, Lorton concluded, as long as these kinds of charges and the atmosphere they create continue.

Lorton asked Gorovoi for his assessment of developments in Afghanistan and the major problems faced by the Taraki Government. Gorovoi thought that the DRA was facing problems common to all revolutions as the old and new classes vie for control. Gorovoi observed that there is a strong religious tradition in

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Afghanistan and indicated this was a source of opposition to a regime which sought to separate church and state and remove religion from politics. He also noted the autonomous traditions of certain tribal groups and observed that a number of dissidents have crossed the border into Pakistan to carry out anti-DRA activities. However, Gorovoi continued, the DRA enjoys a lot of support for its reform programs (such as land reform) which benefit the masses of the Afghan population. He viewed the military as key to the progress of a revolution in developing countries.

Lorton questioned whether the regime indeed had "mass" support, observing that large segments of the general population appear to have expressed their opposition to the regime in the revolt in Herat and by leaving Afghanistan for Pakistan. Lorton suggested that these were indications of less than mass popular support for the regime and a reaction to the harsh measures the regime is taking against its opponents.

Gorovoi responded that every action provokes counteraction and quoted Lenin on the need of a revolution to defend itself. He recalled that large numbers of Russian peasants had opposed the Russian Revolution because they were uneducated and illiterate and did not know where their real interests lay. He saw the task of the Afghan Government's leadership as being the education of the masses regarding their true interests and described this process as difficult.

Lorton concluded by saying that he thought it would indeed be a difficult time ahead for the Afghan people since the DRA appears to prefer destruction of old institutions in favor of new structures rather than attempting to work with or through those institutions.

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